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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Franciscans International, Grail, International Council of Jewish Women, International Council of Women, International Federation for Home Economics, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation of University Women, International Movement ATD Fourth World, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, NGO Committee on UNICEF, NGO Health Committee, Pan Pacific South-East Asia Women's Association, Passionists International, Plan International-Norway, Salvation Army, Sisters of Charity Federation, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, UNANIMA International, United Nations Foundation, World Movement of Mothers and World Youth Alliance, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Critical concerns

1. Gender discrimination contributes to the continuance of poverty. Poverty will not cease until girls and women have the same rights and opportunities in life as boys and men. Research indicates that prevailing social norms and cultural practices have a powerful negative influence on the life opportunities of girls. Key barriers to those opportunities are set out below.

Discriminatory educational practices

2. Education has long-term positive outcomes and is universally accepted as a leading mechanism of poverty eradication and social development. Although there has been an increase in primary school enrolment, many developing nations have not achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education. Gender differences in secondary education remain particularly large, and two thirds of countries have not achieved parity in secondary education. Girls still account for the majority of children who are out of school; are less likely than boys to be enrolled in school; are more likely to drop out; and are less likely to develop vital skills and competencies. Impoverished girls are 3.5 times more likely to be out of school than their wealthier peers.

Child labour

3. As a result of living in poverty, many girls are forced into situations of child labour to ensure their survival. Those at the greatest risk are the poorest, most marginalized children. Child labour perpetuates the cycle of poverty and limits educational opportunities. More than 100 million girls ages 5 to 17 are drawn into child labour around the world, with the majority involved in hazardous work, including domestic service. In many cases, increased risk is associated with higher rates of migration. While both boys and girls engage in exploitative and hazardous work to supplement their family's income, girls are more likely to be hidden, working as domestic servants, or trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation. Child domestic workers as young as five years old often work 12 to 18 hours per day to supplement their family's income. The long hours and working conditions deprive them of their childhood and education, and exclude them from society. Such circumstances place girls at risk of physical, psychological and sexual abuse, which in turn increases their vulnerability to early pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.

Prevailing social norms that support gender-based violence

4. Ultimately, the eradication of poverty will be achieved only if the systemic and structural causes are addressed. Challenging the cultural, traditional and normative practices that condone physical and sexual violence against girls and young women is essential to eradicate poverty.

5. Girls are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence in the household, at school, in the workplace and in the community, resulting in both physical and psychological harm. Sexual violence is widespread. According to worldwide prevalence figures, one in five girls are sexually abused in childhood and, in some countries, up to three quarters of women have been victimized by a

partner. In a recent study of 35 countries, between 10 and 52 per cent of women were found to have experienced physical violence at some point in their lives, and between 10 and 30 per cent reported sexual violence.[1] Child marriage, which is most prevalent in poor, rural communities, often perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Because of pressure to bear sons, young brides miss out on their education and adolescence. They and their future children are also more likely to experience numerous hardships and illnesses, including malnutrition and physical and sexual abuse.

Conclusions

6. Consistent with the Copenhagen Declaration and Platform of Action, we affirm that girls have the right to access education and training to prepare them for decent work, participation and leadership as adults in society. High rates of unemployment and low rates of decent work expose girls to poverty, perpetuating vulnerability to exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation, and the worst forms of labour. Sustainable social development requires that girls be educated and trained, empowering them to participate fully and contribute to their community and society.

7. Girls have the right to freedom from exploitation, as it is harmful to their health and their physical, psychological, spiritual, moral and social development. The trafficking of children and girls violates their human rights.

Recommendation

8. Significant steps towards poverty eradication can be achieved by addressing girls' education, ending child labour and discrimination and violence against girls, and collecting disaggregated data.

9. We urge Member States to:

(a) Commit to gender-sensitive education by:

(i) Undertaking a systematic reform of education at all levels with rights-based, gender-sensitive curricula designed to promote equality and the rights of girls;

(ii) Ensuring all girls have access to quality early childhood development programmes, primary school, secondary school and vocational programmes;

(iii) Enhancing the scientific literacy of all girls by increasing access to science, technology, engineering and math education;

(iv) Investing in quality teacher training that includes gender-sensitive methods;

(v) Increasing the number of women teachers and professors, particularly in the areas of science and technology;

(vi) Removing all barriers to education for girls, including school fees, discriminatory attitudes and curricula, and ensuring their safety travelling to and from school and in the classroom;

[1] World Health Organization, *Addressing Violence against Women and Achieving the Millennium Development Goals* (Geneva, 2005).

(vii) Supporting families through social protection interventions for education, including conditional cash transfers, school food programmes, fellowships and grants;

(viii) Developing comprehensive national education strategies that include dependable long-term funding, ensure adequate education infrastructure and prioritize girls' education in all development plans and poverty reduction schemes;

(b) End child labour by:

(i) Condemning trafficking of children, girls and youth for sexual exploitation and involvement in armed conflict as illegitimate forms of work and violations of human rights and human dignity;

(ii) Providing specialized interventions and appropriate services, including psychosocial support, for all girls who have been trafficked and or involved in armed conflict, hazardous labour or sexual exploitation, in order to address their physical, psychological, social and educational needs, including reintegration into their families, schools and communities;

(iii) Developing future citizens and leaders by providing all girls with age-appropriate knowledge and experiences to prepare them adequately for full economic, social and political participation;

(c) End discrimination and violence against girls by:

(i) Developing, implementing, and enforcing national legislation that ends all forms of discrimination and violence against girls and is consistent with international human rights law;

(ii) Funding programmes to combat discrimination based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, social status, religion, disability and migrant or refugee status;

(iii) Launching public campaigns to empower girls and eliminate all discrimination in the public and private spheres and to promote positive attitudes and behaviours that encourage girls' full partnership in all areas of life;

(iv) Promoting gender-sensitive mentoring with appropriate role models, materials and methods, beginning in early childhood, to ensure that girls grow up to be empowered women who can access higher education;

(v) Enlisting boys and men as partners in tackling gender-based violence and developing programmes to promote changes in both attitudes and behaviours and to address ideologies of masculinity favouring violence within cultural norms and practices;

(vi) Creating safe spaces for girls and young women to meet, share experiences, gain new knowledge and skills to overcome gender barriers to participation in the public domain and expand opportunities for social engagement.